

Interview with **COURTLAND COX**
Interviewed by Richard Maulsby

Courtland Cox was active in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee [SNCC] while a student at Howard University in DC. He knew Marion Barry who had been the first President of SNCC and was living in DC. Cox helped with the 1978 campaign and entered the first Barry administration as Director of the Minority Business Opportunity Commission.

Date of Interview: August 20, 2015

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Would you start, Courtland, by telling us your name and spell it, first and last?

COURTLAND COX: Yes. My name is Courtland, C-o-u-r-t-l-a-n-d, last name Cox.

INTERVIEWER: C-o-x.

COURTLAND COX: C-o-x, right.

INTERVIEWER: Courtland, tell us about your background, where you came from, where you went to school. How did you end up in Washington, D.C.?

COURTLAND COX: I attended Howard University. I came to Howard University in 1960. And so I came down from New York to attend Howard University, and basically have been in Washington since that time, not living all that time, but in that time because, say, between the period of 1960 and 1968, I spent a lot of time with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC], which did a lot of voter registration and other kinds of direct action kinds of things in the South. So while I was based in Washington and spent, I guess, 4 years at Howard, and then during the summers going back and forth to the South or participating in the March on Washington or doing various things in the Civil Rights Movement, generally I was always back to Washington at some point.

INTERVIEWER: When did you move here finally?

COURTLAND COX: I would say that I finally moved to Washington in I would—maybe about 1969. That's when we opened up the Drum and Spear Bookstore and the Drum and Spear Press and then started doing a number of things here in Washington.

INTERVIEWER: Where was that located?

COURTLAND COX: The Drum and Spear Bookstore was located 14th and Fairmont Street. In fact, the city has a little plaque on the building commemorating the Drum and Spear Bookstore.

INTERVIEWER: When did you meet Marion Barry?

COURTLAND COX: I met Marion Barry, I would say, maybe 1962, '61, '62. So it's about a couple of years, maybe—you know, a couple of years ago, over 50 years ago, 53 years ago. We were both field secretaries for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. And basically we were working in the South doing a number of things. Marion was sent up to Washington, D.C., by Jim Forman, who was the executive secretary of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, to help do fundraising. So he really was not supposed to be activist and a participant in the situation in Washington. He came and he did that, but he was sent to Washington to help raise funds and do supportive things for what was going on in the South.

INTERVIEWER: When you first knew Marion, did you have any sense that he was going to someday be interested in electoral politics?

COURTLAND COX: Well, Marion and I were on opposite sides of the debate that went on in SNCC.

INTERVIEWER: Tell us about that.

COURTLAND COX: Marion—Marion—there were two sides. One was whether SNCC was part of a movement or whether SNCC was part of an organization. And, you know, therefore, if it was part of the Movement, then one would try to be more avant-garde, more—the organization—and really function around a structure of the organization, it would have less structure, it would have less reporting, it would have—you know, it was really beginning to look at, you know, motion as opposed to structure. And I was viewed as being on that side of the organization.

Marion was viewed as being on the side of the organization that wanted to maintain structure, you know, have accountability, wanted to have reports, and so forth. So, I mean, I think my earliest memories of Marion was that kind of conflict as to which way the organization would go, whether it would be a Movement or whether it would be an organization.

INTERVIEWER: And which side won out?

COURTLAND COX: Well, actually, I would say that at the end of the day, the Movement—SNCC was always a Movement organization. It was always a Movement. You know, SNCC lasted until 1968-69 as a formal organization. So I think most of us—I mean, you've got to realize, I mean, Marion was on the older side of us. You know, when I met Marion, I was, I would say, 21, 22, and he was, you know, maybe 4 or 5 years older than me. And in that, it was a big difference. I mean, you know, the difference—I mean, because a lot of people in SNCC were, I mean, you know, I would say 18, 19, 20. Julian Bond, who just passed, was 20 years old. I mean, we were

generally between 17 and 21. And if you were 25 and above, you were a little on the older side. If you got to be 30, boy, that was really old. A different perspective at this point.

But when I met Marion, I was probably about 22, and he was probably—Marion would have been maybe 4 or 5 years older than me. So, I mean, that's kind of when we met him. And so my sense is that in terms of the organization, even we continued to function, we continued to do a lot of stuff, but given that people were growing old and growing up, you know, people then began to move in various things in terms of their lives, and Marion started beginning to use the geography and the platform of Washington, D.C., to become involved in, you know, actions and Movement actions here in Washington with, you know, whether it was going against O. Roy Chalk [owner of the DC bus system] in terms of the segregated bus systems or involving—you know, trying to get the youth—almost the same problem we have today in terms of getting young people in the employment arena, whether—he just started doing a lot of things that he learned and we did, and the philosophy that we had out of SNCC he began to bring to Washington.

And the other thing was that people in SNCC, having engaged in a lot of Movement stuff, whether it was freedom riots or sit-ins or various kinds of things like that, a number of us probably started in '65, and probably Julian Bond was the first who moved into elected office. And when he moved into elected office, a number of people started looking at that, and people like Ivanhoe Donaldson [Barry's campaign manager in 1978 and close advisor] and Judy Richardson [SNCC Staff Member] and Charlie Cobb [SNCC Field Secretary] began to do things to help others get into political office.

And we also saw that, you know, being in protests was not enough, so in places like Lowndes County [Alabama], you know, we not only engaged in getting people to vote, but we engaged in people to assuming the power that was in there. So we started thinking much more than just, okay, let's just get people to vote because it's a good thing and a civic thing. You know, we started discussing what it is to assume power, and what did you do with it once you got the assumed power?

So as you begin to see, a lot of Marion's direction comes out of the Movement, and the thinking come out of the Movement, because basically, you know, in SNCC, the whole discussion was focusing on the least of these, you know, beginning to—because we always had a bottom-up philosophy as opposed to a top-down philosophy, so that as you would see that, you know, we worked with the sharecroppers, who most people thought these people are ignorant and you can't get them to vote or they shouldn't be allowed to vote, but we had a focus saying that they were American citizens; even though they were exploited economically, it was important for them to be able to vote. So we always focused on the least of these.

The other big influence both on Marion and all of us in SNCC was Ella Baker [who worked for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), was the Director of NAACP Chapters, and

was an organizer for the YWCA]. And Ella, you know, basically had a view that said strong people did not need strong leaders, and therefore, that was another big issue.

The other big issue that learned from SNCC was the issue of not being intimidated by the fears that were in the environment at that time. And, you know, one big issue, and I know people have forgotten this, but McCarthyism was big in the late '50s and early '60s, and, you know, to be called a Communist, and to be—you had to watch who you associated with and all that, and we just blew past that, we didn't care about that. I mean, we felt that, you know, that, you know, we weren't going to be consumed by people's fears.

And then the other thing was who should be included in the discussion, and SNCC was—it was a diverse group. I mean, we believed in diversity and conversation. So I would say we never had a discussion about the world on anything that lasted less than 8 to 10 hours.

[Laughter.]

COURTLAND COX: So my sense is by the time Marion got here and by the time we all got here, and we were—you know, we were in our late twenties by the time we got to D.C., but we had our whole view of the world, our whole perspective, had been formed by that time based on the experiences that we've had in an 8-year period.

INTERVIEWER: So you come here in '69.

COURTLAND COX: Right.

INTERVIEWER: What was your impression of the city in '69? You had been a student here, so—

COURTLAND COX: Yeah. I mean, our impression here in '69 was that there was a lot to be done, you know, that we would need to continue the challenges that were exhibited here in Washington. I mean, when I first came here, in Washington, I mean, it was a—housing was segregated. As I mentioned, there were no blacks who were bus drivers, O. Roy Chalk. When I first came here, I mean, they had—and the *Washington Post* had asked for blacks and for whites. Clifton Terrace, which is right in the heart of the present-day—well, there is no longer a present-day black community, but Clifton Terrace was segregated, I mean, it was only whites living in Clifton Terrace. And not much had changed. I mean, we also had—you know, the big issue was the Congress ran the city, and you did not have much of a way of allowing your voice and the wishes of the community to be heard. So, I mean, that was the big deal. I think that, you know, the kind of dependency and the kind of plantation system that we had here in 1969 was something that really dominated the discussion.

INTERVIEWER: So in 1969, post-Civil Rights Bill, '64, Voting Rights Act, March on Washington, all that, D.C., when you came here, was still—

COURTLAND COX: Yeah. I mean, I think—I mean, I can't remember the years that—you know, when some things changed on a small level, whether O. Roy Chalk had hired one or two people or so forth; when I came here, they had none. One of the first things I did when I came here is picketed RFK stadium because, you know, the Redskins [football team] had no black players. But, I mean, some of that had changed. But the big issue at that time, you know, when I came back in '69, was the relationship of the Congress to the people who lived here, and most of the people who were on the committee that, you know, ran this city, they were from the South, particularly South Carolina and places like that, and so—and, you know, the government was run by people, you know, from the military coming in and taking—they wanted to retire, they needed something, and these guys would just come and give them the jobs. So we were excluded from our ability to participate in our own political lives.

INTERVIEWER: The City Council at this point was appointed?

COURTLAND COX: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And the Mayor?

COURTLAND COX: The Mayor—well, the City Council was appointed, and I think Walter Washington, when I came back, was the appointed Mayor. Yes, he was appointed Mayor. Because I remember after King was assassinated, he was the person that was telling the National Guards where to go in the city and so forth. But he was the appointed Mayor.

INTERVIEWER: So when you got here in '69, did you connect with Marion Barry right away?

COURTLAND COX: Yeah. I mean, you know, I mean, SNCC—I mean, SNCC people are always connecting to each other. I mean, so, I mean, I did not—while I didn't—you know, I know he was doing Pride [a youth training and employment program Marion ran] at that point, and I wasn't part of that, but we were all doing things in the city, and if we needed to call on each other, we would call on each other even though we weren't structurally connected.

INTERVIEWER: Marion first ran for the School Board.

COURTLAND COX: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And then for City Council. Were you involved in those campaigns?

COURTLAND COX: You know, I probably was, but I can't remember any details about what I was. I remember that he would say that he was inspired by Marvin Gaye's song *Save the*

Children, and that was—you know, and he used that as his theme. You know, he used that song as his theme. So, I mean, we were probably, you know, probably through Ivanhoe and others, we were probably connected, but not to the level that we were connected when he ran for Mayor.

INTERVIEWER: But before he ran for Mayor in '78, you hadn't been involved—

COURTLAND COX: Not really, not in any serious way. I mean, you know, I listened to him in terms of what he would—you know, why he—how he chose a theme, and he was listening to Marvin Gaye, and he heard that theme, you know, *Save the Children*, and that quote inspired him in this discussion. Whether it's real or not, I don't know.

[Laughter.]

INTERVIEWER: Did you vote for him?

COURTLAND COX: Oh, yeah. You know, I voted for Johnny Wilson [who became the Ward 2 City Council member]. I mean, Johnny Wilson was also a SNCC person. You know, I mean, Eleanor Holmes Norton [elected DC Delegate to Congress in 1990] is a SNCC person. You know, there were a number of people who influenced this, you know, politics in Washington that came out of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

INTERVIEWER: When did you first have a conversation with Marion Barry about his running for Mayor?

COURTLAND COX: You know, I think—well, I mean, just—I'm not sure, but I know that Walter Washington was the Mayor. Then a lot of the black middle class wanted Sterling Tucker to run because Walter Washington was kind of older and old school, and the group—and I guess we were, you know, either in our late thirties or early forties, and Sterling was much older also, but people saw him as the right person to run.

INTERVIEWER: Who was Sterling Tucker?

COURTLAND COX: Sterling Tucker was the chairperson of the Council at that time, and—

INTERVIEWER: Had he been involved in the Civil Rights Movement as well?

COURTLAND COX: He was at the Urban League, and, you know, that's tangential. It was tangential to the Civil Rights Movement.

[Laughter.]

COURTLAND COX: No, no, no. They were part of the Civil Rights Movement. And, you know, my sense is that Marion was considered a youngster. And I guess the conversations began with, you know, they were trying to convince Marion that he should wait his turn, that, you know, there was a kind of—you know, Walter Washington had been of one generation, you know, Sterling Tucker was of another generation, and Marion was, quote, young enough that he could wait his turn and so forth. And our view was, no, this is our turn, this is the time to do what we wanted to do. So most of our conversations, you know, that we had with—around, quote, the SNCC people, that's kind of what I, you know, would say, is, how do we now support Marion, and how do we now overcome the kind of pressures from the black leadership in this town about Marion should wait his turn? Because that was the big thing. He was just a Council member, you know. So you had the Mayor, who was Walter Washington, you had Sterling Tucker was the Council president, and then you had Marion, who was a Council member, who was viewed full of energy, was viewed as the champion of the street dudes, was viewed as somebody who was different, who would shake stuff up, and people were trying to hold him at abeyance, and we decided, no, this was something that we would do. So it wasn't kind of, you know, sitting down and saying, okay, let's just sink—you know, my sense is my early conversations with Marion and others was, okay, he was going to be—you know, he's young, but they were coming at him on this issue, how do we mount a campaign to blunt that and to move Marion ahead?

INTERVIEWER: And who were the other people that were in this discussion?

COURTLAND COX: Well, I mean, my sense is I would say I remember having conversations with Del Lewis [telephone company executive and Barry supporter]. I remember having a conversation—well, obviously, Ivanhoe [Donaldson], you know. And the other person who was just kind of really in and out, but it took a long time to get him in, was Johnny Wilson, you know, because Johnny, you know, although he came out of SNCC and we could put a lot of pressure on him, Johnny was also on the Council, and, you know, Johnny was trying to figure out how to play his game. I'm trying to—I can't remember others who I just—you know, just come to the top of my head, but I know we had those conversations with maybe, say, Reggie Robinson [SNCC veteran] or some others around, but I can't remember all of the names.

INTERVIEWER: Is this in '76, '77, or—

COURTLAND COX: That—I don't remember the years.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, yeah. But at some point, there was never any doubt in your mind that Marion was going to go for it.

COURTLAND COX: Oh, no, there was never any doubt, no, no. You know, he got on the Board, as you said, got on the School Board, you know, with "Save the Children," decided to go to become the chair of the School Board, got there, you know, got on the Council. And, you know,

they wanted him—I think basically wanted him to maybe run for Council president or something like that, but, no, he wanted to run for Mayor.

INTERVIEWER: And when did you get actively involved in the '78 campaign? By the way, what were you doing at this time?

COURTLAND COX: I was doing stuff—I was still doing Movement stuff. I was doing stuff that dealt with the Sahel [the arid area across northern Africa where the Sahara Desert transitions into savannah]. There was a—you know, there were big issues with food and big issues with the [African] liberation movement, so I was doing a lot of stuff in either the Sahel, around the Sahel, of Africa, with, you know, that there was—there were—I mean, during that period—and I remember it was maybe '76, '77, and so forth—that there was a great lack of water in the Sahel and people were having great problems. And the other thing I was doing was also working with people in liberation movements. So a lot of stuff I was doing probably was international as opposed to, you know, doing—but I was still doing Movement stuff, you know, at that point.

INTERVIEWER: And you still had the bookstore?

COURTLAND COX: We still had the bookstore. No, the bookstore was probably by—I would say the bookstore—no, I think the bookstore might have been—it wasn't flourishing, so it was about to go out of business by around that time.

INTERVIEWER: Right. So Marion announced for Mayor, was it early '78?

COURTLAND COX: Right, right.

INTERVIEWER: And did you start to work in the campaign right away? And what did you do?

COURTLAND COX: Yeah. I mean, my sense is a lot of what I tried to do was deal with the likes of Bob Washington [attorney and chairman of the DC Democratic Party] and all these others who were in for Sterling Tucker because we had a group—a Saturday—what's called a Saturday club, which had Ron Brown [lawyer and Director of the Urban League's Washington office, later Chair of the National Democratic Party and Secretary of Commerce in the Clinton Administration] and Cliff Alexander [lawyer, former candidate for Mayor in 1974, and Secretary of the Army in the Carter Administration] and Vinny Cohen [lawyer and partner at the law firm of Hogan and Hartson] and Bob Washington. I mean, it was the, quote, you know, elite group in this town. And—

INTERVIEWER: No women.

COURTLAND COX: Huh?

INTERVIEWER: No women.

COURTLAND COX: It was all men. It was basketball, we played basketball, you know, that was it. And this is—and, you know, at that time, there was a huge push to get, you know, everybody in the club behind Sterling. And a lot of my first memories was combating that. I mean, I remember Bob Washington would always come on Saturdays and say, "You better Tuck on in." You know, so that was—but, I mean, you know, I'm beginning to operate within that environment and begin to show that there were some people who were going to support Marion in that environment.

INTERVIEWER: Were you the only one in that group that was supporting Marion at that point?

COURTLAND COX: You know—

INTERVIEWER: Vinny Cohen?

COURTLAND COX: I would say—I'm trying to think. I mean, I think, you know, while Bob Washington was out there as the big, you know, big pusher of Sterling Tucker. I think those guys were not as vocal on this issue, but I would say they were probably more inclined to support Sterling Tucker as opposed to support Marion because I think they kind of bought into the view, you know, we have nothing against Marion, Marion is a great guy, and so forth, but he's a youngster and he needs to wait his turn.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

COURTLAND COX: I mean, so I think, you know, that was the balance and the fight that we had to make. So I wouldn't say that—I probably was—I mean, anybody who was prepared to fight back on it, probably I was the one who was doing that, but, I mean, I think these guys, while they were not vocal and open, I think at the end of the day they probably were prepared to support Sterling, maybe with the exception of Ron Brown, maybe with the exception of Ron Brown, but he wasn't vocal either.

INTERVIEWER: So besides doing that, trying to peel some of those people off, what other kinds of things did you get involved in, in the campaign?

COURTLAND COX: I mean, I was probably—you know, I know I was doing, you know, whatever one does in these political campaigns. I know I was doing outreach and doing, you know, probably a number of things like that. I know I wasn't doing what you were doing because I remember—I remember the Gertrude Stein Club. What impressed me about the Gertrude Stein Club is that the members of the club would be there every day and making calls and doing that kind of stuff, and I know I wasn't doing that.

[Laughter.]

COURTLAND COX: Making these calls and being on there. I mean, that kind of, you know, really getting your hands dirty work.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, yeah.

COURTLAND COX: I mean, I know that's what you guys—so I know I wasn't doing what you guys were doing, but I was probably really kind of more involved in kind of helping to shape policy, kind of more trying to deal with certain categories of people, you know. I remember having meetings with Del Lewis in his office, helping to raise money, that kind of stuff. I know I wasn't doing the nitty-gritty work.

INTERVIEWER: But, I mean, did you do outreach to the small business, the minority, community?

COURTLAND COX: No, because at that point, I really hadn't gotten into that. I hadn't gotten into that, you know, because, as I said, a lot of what I was doing was much more involved in terms of political stuff, more involved in making sure that—you know, a lot of stuff was the international stuff. So I was just coming back into the country, I mean intellectually coming back into the country when Marion started running. So, I mean, a lot of it, mine was dealing with policy, dealing with fundraising, dealing with constituencies that were, you know, in the black community, but they were not businesspeople, they were more on the professional side. I mean, the reality was actually before Marion came in and his first administration, there was no such thing as a black business community here. I mean, Marion created it, so there was nobody to talk to.

[Laughter.]

INTERVIEWER: So when you look back on the campaign, what do you see as key moments in that campaign in '78?

COURTLAND COX: Ivanhoe calling me at 4:00 in the morning telling me that—

[Interruption: cell phone rings.]

INTERVIEWER: Sorry. Go ahead.

COURTLAND COX: Ivanhoe calling me at 4:00 in the morning after there was a meeting with a number of people, Sterling Brown's *[sic]* people, trying to push Marion out of the race.

INTERVIEWER: Sterling Tucker's people.

COURTLAND COX: I mean Sterling Tucker's people. Sorry. Sterling Tucker's people trying to push him out of the race, and I guess Channing Phillips was there and a number of other people whose names I can't recall.

INTERVIEWER: Was Reverend Eaton there?

COURTLAND COX: Reverend David Eaton [pastor of All Souls Unitarian Church], that's who I was thinking.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

COURTLAND COX: David Eaton and people trying to get Marion out of the race. And, you know, Ivanhoe saying, "Okay, we've got to think of something." I was saying to myself, it is 4:00 in the morning, I didn't care. He kept me on the phone for an hour, you know, talking about what we were going to do and how we were going to handle it. And I remember the decision that was clear that we were not going to move out, it was clear that we had to ramp up visibility, and that's when the whole idea that there was a trolley in town that was there, and I remember Del Lewis and Bob Johnson [owner of Black Entertainment Television], you know, making arrangements to get the trolley and us beginning to go around town to ramp up, you know, to make greater visibility. [A double-decker London bus, not a trolley, was hired, decorated with Marion Barry banners and was used when Marion went out campaigning in the neighborhoods].

The other thing I remember that's interesting are the debates.

INTERVIEWER: Hmm.

COURTLAND COX: And it was clear that—so the first debate, Sterling Tucker, whether he wanted to or whether it was the positioning, he was sitting in the middle, and Sterling Tucker is not a big person, and both Marion—Marion was maybe 6'1", something like that, maybe Walter Washington may be 5'11", and Walter is kind of a big guy, you know. And we sat there, and I looked, and Walter Washington and Marion talked, and Sterling just tried to seem to be the reasonable, you know, mayoral type, and so he didn't say a lot. He wanted to have people have a sense that these two people are bickering, but he was the reasonable one. And we kind of observed it, and one of the things we said to Marion is in each debate—at each debate going forward, make sure you put Sterling in the middle because he's dwarfed, and as opposed to him looking mayoral, he looks small. And, you know, so that is the other thing that I remember in terms of trying to think through how you position Marion and how you would begin to deal with Sterling, who we viewed as the greater of the threats to Marion's ability to function.

The other thing that we have to—I remember is, you know, the role that the *Washington Post* played. You know, the *Washington Post* was very much behind Marion, and I forgot her last name, but Patricia—oh, Patricia, I forgot her last—I don't remember the last name—she was the person on the editorial page, and every time the *Post* showed that Marion needed a boost, you know, we would go to her, and she would get the editorial page to do a piece that would help. And at that point, the *Washington Post*, an editorial support from the *Washington Post*, meant a big—I mean, it doesn't mean that much today, but it really meant a big deal because what people don't realize is that Marion won Wards 1, 2, 3, and 6, and so Marion won most of the wards that had a majority white population, which flipped later on, and it was because of the *Washington Post*. So, I mean, I think, you know, those are the kind—

The other thing I remember is cornering Johnny Wilson because Johnny Wilson was going up and down, and up and down, about whether he would come out and endorse Marion, and Marion asked those of us who were at SNCC to put constant pressure on Johnny, and Johnny Wilson came out—I think it was after the thing where they tried to move because that was—you know, we were trying to get or mount as much support as we could. So we really told Johnny—we put tremendous pressure on him based on our relationships, you know, from SNCC.

INTERVIEWER: So do you think that maneuver to push Marion out really backfired and ended up working in Marion's advantage?

COURTLAND COX: I would say so. I mean, my sense is that it put us—I mean, it put us on, you know, the highest alert, and it just said that from that time on to whenever we just were—we did things after that maneuver that we probably would not have done. We probably—I would not have been up at 4:00.

[Laughter.]

COURTLAND COX: We probably would not have gotten that bus, I mean not the trolley, that went around the city, we probably wouldn't have done that. Johnny would have probably still been waffling back and forth. And we probably would have had probably two less editorials in the *Washington Post*. So, you know, my sense is that I'm not sure whether it was a determinative factor, but it certainly put the discussion at another level.

INTERVIEWER: Going back to the debates and the effort to position Sterling Tucker, was that sort of the strategic thinking from the campaign, that the electorate had decided they didn't want Walter Washington?

COURTLAND COX: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And so who is the alternative—

COURTLAND COX: Yes. Sterling Tucker was. And we wanted to make him seem weak. He thought he was seeming mayoral, and we thought it came—looking at it, it came across as he looked weak, and that is what we wanted to project.

INTERVIEWER: So why did Marion Barry win?

COURTLAND COX: I think a lot of it was a combination of factors. I think first, Marion was, by that time, a known quantity. Whether people liked him or not, he was known. Second, he was a person who a lot of people thought would stand up for those during—who were the least of these. You know, the city was at that point majority black, and, you know, I think the people—the economic center of the city thought that they needed somebody who had the energy to engage people at the bottom because the question of unemployment and so forth was still an issue.

Marion had showed like with his work with Wirtz, Willard Wirtz [US Secretary of Labor 1962-9, who underwrote Marion's youth program, Pride, Inc.], and others like that at Labor, that he could engage the Government in that. You know, and Marion had come up with—you know, he characterized the Walter Washington administration as "bumpling and bumbling" and so forth, and he captured in a phrase, in a couple of phrases, what a lot of the economic powers thought about the Walter Washington administration. So I think that we probably had a combination of young, dynamic—I would say young, dynamic—I guess young, we were at that point, we were like late thirties.

INTERVIEWER: Young.

COURTLAND COX: Yeah.

[Laughter.]

COURTLAND COX: And, I mean, we showed a lot more energy, we had a lot more creativity, and we probably had a greater sense of moving the city forward than, say, Sterling, who was much more reserved and thinking that—I mean, his thought was that he would just appeal to certain groups and that they would put him over. And I just—because Marion won with 35 percent of the vote.

So, I mean, the other big thing that made a big difference—and you don't know how this would have come out—but there were three people there, and it was not a 50 percent requirement, so, you know, 35 percent—I forgot what Sterling got. I mean, he must have got maybe in the high twenties or something like that. So, I mean, my sense, probably those are the factors that put him over.

INTERVIEWER: So what did you do on election day?

COURTLAND COX: I was actually, election day, did a lot of work and stuff like that, you know, get out the vote and stuff like that, and actually wound up at night at Florence Tate's [1978 campaign press secretary] house.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, at night. Okay.

COURTLAND COX: And I was talking to Milton Coleman [*Washington Post* reporter], and I said to him, "How is Walter Washington taking this?" And he said, "Oh, you mean the has-been?" I mean, really—I mean, I was really kind of taken back by that statement. So we were—I mean, because—so on election day, I mean, we did all the stuff at the polls and handing out stuff and doing all that kind of stuff, but a number of us who were part of SNCC, you know, and I believe—I'm not sure, I can't remember whether Marion was there or not, but I know we all wound up at Florence Tate's house, and, of course, Florence had been very close to SNCC, too. And we kind of—I think we were kind of—I think, as I recall, we were kind of amazed that we pulled it off. You know, we were kind of—I mean, because this was our first effort in the big city. It was kind of new for all of us, and that we pulled it off was a big surprise to some of us.

INTERVIEWER: Did you think right up to election day you were not going to pull it off?

[Laughter.]

COURTLAND COX: Well, I mean, I don't know. I mean, my sense is that I think right up to election day we thought that we would do everything to try to pull it off, and a lot of that is centered around Ivanhoe's mentality, you know, and as a group, we were not used to—we were used to making sure that if we wanted to go after something, it would happen. So, I mean, we weren't—it wasn't clear that we would win, but, you know, we were hoping to win, and then when we won, it was still a surprise, you know. So, I mean, I think we—I didn't think we went in there saying we would lose, but we still were surprised that we won.

[Laughter.]

INTERVIEWER: And so you came along with the transition?

COURTLAND COX: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And what did you do in terms of the transitioning?

COURTLAND COX: I did a bunch of—I did a number of interviews with people, hiring people. Particularly I remember the interview with Bob Moore, who became Housing Director. You know, kind of—I remember the discussions with Colonel Starobin, who was running I guess at

that point it was called General Services. He was the chief procurement officer, and his reputation was horrible among, you know, business—well, I mean, the professionals, and he—I mean, because the General Services, he was an Army colonel—I mean, there were nothing but colonels over there, Army colonel, Air Force colonel, I mean, there were colonels I mean all up and down the government. And, you know, I remember Marion, you know, telling Steroben that he was gone, so, I mean, so I was involved in the whole transitional discussion.

I remember a conversation—and I think this was an important conversation—the conversation went on about what you would do with those who were not with you before the primary, particularly people like Bob Washington and those who were with Sterling Tucker, and, you know, people maybe like Jim Hudson [lawyer], who supported Walter Washington and so forth. And there was one side that said, "Okay, to the victor belongs the spoils." There was another side, to his credit, Ivanhoe said, "No, you now have to be Mayor of all the people and you have to be open to everybody." And, you know, Marion went with that side. Some of the people who supported Marion thought, well, you know, maybe it was better not to support him because he was now open to everybody and everything. But I think that was probably the most fateful decision Marion made.

INTERVIEWER: And it was Marion's decision?

COURTLAND COX: Yes, made to be open and to not hold grudges and not say, "Well, you didn't support me," such-and-such, you know, "and you're out," and stuff. He created a more open environment. I think that probably was very important, you know, because I think that if you look at other administrations that have that insular view, it's then really a downward spiral. You know, I think a number of people who put Marion there, they were not overly happy that Marion embraced as many people as he could, you know, but I think during the transition, probably—that was probably the most important decision he made, you know, being—what political environment would he operate under? You know, the ability to deal with that.

The other thing I think that—another decision that Marion—I think was important during that period was Marion's decision to pull on his history from SNCC and really emphasize diversity. So as you remember, I mean, particularly Mary [sic] King probably had the worst of it—I mean, when she was doing Boards and Commissions, she had to—

INTERVIEWER: You mean Betty King.

COURTLAND COX: I mean—sorry—Betty King. You know, Betty King had the worst of it, you know. But, I mean, that whole issue of making sure of geographic—particularly, you know, people from east of the river, making sure that that was a big issue, making sure women were involved, and I think that was another big issue, making sure that people from the gay community—but I think probably those three big pieces, those who were east of the river were men—people from the gay community, those probably were the drivers in—you know, because

I think probably most of these Boards and Commissions were people from Ward 4, Ward 1, Ward 3, Ward 2, and not east of the river. So, I mean, I think that is—you know, I think that's another big decision.

You know, and I think, unlike most people who come to office, I mean, Marion's responsibility. The other thing that he brought into it, but it was not immediately after, is breaking down barriers, and when I say "breaking down barriers," I meant, you know, from Wall Street. He told the people from Wall Street, "You know, don't just send anybody that you—," "I need to have somebody who looks like me in order to have this conversation." He told the big law firms, "You've got to have partners." He told, you know, the big accounting firms. So that's the other thing that was big in terms of his—you know, there was an economic environment that was functioning and that he used his office and the audacity of his views to begin to break that kind of system down.

So, you know, my sense is that during the transition, a lot of the discussion wasn't about what you usually have. I mean, there was, there was that discussion. Steroben had to go and we had to get rid of all those colonels over there who dealt with procurement and so forth. We had to bring in some of the brightest and the best. But I think in addition to that, you know, in those interviews and what you're doing, he made big broad decisions that made a difference. He was going to include those who were opposed to him. Diversity was a big issue. Barriers were no longer tolerated, you know. And also that—and the inclusion also had to be with—there are two groups, seniors and children. I mean, you know the seniors love Marion, right? I mean, he took those decisions early on, so they weren't add-ons to the way he governed, they were fundamental to the way he governed. And I think, you know, I mean, those decisions were made during the first transition. I mean, that is—so in addition to—so while I sat in the interviews with senior staff or while I was in conversations with some of the people, you know, that he wanted to go out—you know, the other big decision, he wanted to build the business community, and, I mean, that was not my first view, I mean, that was not my first choice, but—

INTERVIEWER: What was it?

COURTLAND COX: Some probably regular thing with—you know, in running something. But, I mean, I think both Ivanhoe and Marion talked me into doing it. And, you know, my sense was that it made a big difference because it was central to his discussion, so in Cabinet meetings, he would ask me to report on agencies, and, you know, nothing focuses the mind of a Cabinet member when the chief executive is asking these questions. So, I mean, my sense is that, I mean, I think that Marion was—he was unusual in the sense that while he did focus on governing, he had bigger ideas about what governance was about.

The other thing that Marion—an advantage that Marion had coming in is that he had worked in the community all along, so people in the various government agencies, he knew who they were. And Marion would call them up, "What's going on in your agency?" I mean, so—and he

had a very good gift for names, I mean, he would remember people's names. So, I mean, he would know as much as what's going on in any agency as the director. I mean, so he—coming in, he brought all those things with him, and I must say, as I look back on it, I think Marion's governance really reflect his Movement experience and where he came in terms of the Movement and his relationship to people and what—you know, and particularly to deal with the least of these. You know, I think that that whole view that you deal with the least of these, that you have, you know, people who are strong, and you don't need strong leaders. Now, I mean, I think that, you know, shaped his early thinking. I mean, that's kind of my sense of the way that things went.

INTERVIEWER: I think what you've been saying sort of anticipated what my question was going to be, my next question, which was, you know, what difference did it make had Tucker or Walter Washington been elected Mayor? How did the city—

COURTLAND COX: Well, a huge difference, a huge difference. You know, I went to lunch with a young lady earlier this year, and she—I mean, she came up during Marion's thing, and, you know, she said, "You know, you guys spoiled us because we thought that there were no limitations, that we were the center, we were able to do things. Now that Marion is no longer here, no longer there, there is a harsh reality we have to face, that you guys gave us a cover and ability to do things." I think had Walter Washington won, you know, there wasn't going to be much change. Had Sterling won, probably the African American professionals might have done a little better, but I don't think we'd have much more. But when you talk about what difference did it make, I think, first, you would not have had a focus on young people that Marion brought and the kind of the leadership kinds of things. I mean, today, Kwame Brown, who was former chair [of the DC City Council] and was part of the Marion Barry Youth Leadership Institute, that's how he got involved in politics. You know, senior citizens would have not had what they had. As I mentioned, the business, there would not be a business, there would have not been the business community that exists today. I don't think that Sterling and them would have focused on diversity, as Marion did. It was not in their DNA to make a difference; it was in their DNA to get elected. It was in Marion's DNA to make a difference. I mean, I think that's the big—that's the differentiating factor I would say.

INTERVIEWER: But you really—you go back to SNCC.

COURTLAND COX: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: That's really the whole—

COURTLAND COX: Yes. I go back to SNCC. Had Marion not been in SNCC, he would have not had the whole world view that he had. Marion was the first chair of SNCC, and the reason he was the first chair of SNCC, he was probably one of the older people in the room.

[Laughter.]

INTERVIEWER: You keep going back to this thing.

[Laughter.]

COURTLAND COX: I mean, no, no, I mean, you've got to remember, when I talk to the young people today, I talk to what they call the millennials and stuff, and I said to you—I would say to them, "You know, when I was your age, I was considered old." You know, I was doing stuff when I was 20, 21, 22, you know, but, I mean, it was—you've got to remember this was—I mean, it was a tremendous piece where people who are generally considered just voting either an irresponsibility or just assuming responsibility were taking tremendous responsibility not only for their own lives but for the lives of others and for the way this country was going. I mean, you know, as somebody said, there is nothing that focuses a mind like an execution?

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm

COURTLAND COX: I mean, we—I mean, all of us, faced, by the time we were 21, 22, 23, in Mississippi, Alabama, wherever it was, you had a real possibility of death based on what we were doing. So we grew up a lot, we grew up fast, and, I mean, and I think the ability to take on a system that had existed, you know, since *Plessy v. Ferguson* [the Supreme Court decision making "separate but equal" segregation legal], you know, 1896, and begin to change that system was a tremendous weight. So I think that we all were different, and Marion was different, and Marion was able to govern differently because he understood that to be in power, you really had to make a difference if it was going to make—you know. I mean, one of the things I remember, you know, I was in the first Cabinet meeting and I was sitting next to the police chief, and I really—it was Maurice—

INTERVIEWER: It might have been Maurice Turner. No, he—

COURTLAND COX: No, no, no, no, no. No, I was sitting on—it must have been—it wasn't Maurice, but I was sitting next to the police chief, and I kept saying to myself, "Why am I sitting next to this police chief? I'm always in opposition."

[Laughter.]

COURTLAND COX: I mean, I had to switch my thinking from protest to power because I was always on the other side. And, you know, I came to the view that it's always better to be in power as opposed to protest because when you're in power you can make the decisions, you can call the shots. When you're in protest, you're asking those in power to call the shots.

So I think that Marion understood, you know, power. He understood the need to govern and to govern openly, but he also understood the need to govern with a purpose. And, you know, you see a lot of—I mean, now, I must also say that because he did that, there was a lot of opposition that came his way because those who were particularly in economic power felt the need to move in a different direction because, you know, they viewed it as a zero-sum gain, the more for others, the less for us, but at least, you know, given an opportunity from SNCC, he brought that mindset. Sterling Tucker nor Walter Washington would have brought it.

The other thing I think is that I don't think they would have brought, you know, the level—I mean, I think everybody—I mean, I think most objective observers would say Marion's first term was clearly one of the outstanding terms in this city. I don't think the others could have attracted the talent that Marion attracted. I know Walter couldn't because he—I mean, they didn't even—I mean, the generational issues were too big.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever talked to people who were involved in Walter Washington's campaign or Sterling Tucker's campaign to get their take on things and why they lost? Did you ever have a conversation with Joe Yeldell [fixture in DC government for many years spanning many Mayors] about that?

COURTLAND COX: No, I mean, you know, Joe was my neighbor. Not really. I mean, I think that the big thing was that once Marion decided to be open and bring people in and so forth, they just said, hey, let's just go with it. So, I mean, I think they were very much appreciative of Marion's early decision to be open and not, you know, say, "You all got to go," and so forth. I mean, you know, so I just think that—I mean, there were people that Marion—you know, who were part of Walter Washington's administration who Marion went after, but, I mean, most of them were people put in there by the former—you know, the congressional people. I remember one guy who was I guess at that point a GS-16 who he put over in my shop because the guy had a few years to retire, I mean about a year to retire, and Marion didn't just want to fire him, so he put him over in my shop. Now, the guy resented it, but at least he got a pension.

INTERVIEWER: What was your shop, by the way?

COURTLAND COX: Minority Business Opportunity Commission.

INTERVIEWER: And that was the first job you had in the administration?

COURTLAND COX: Yes. The Director of the Minority Business Opportunity Commission.

INTERVIEWER: And there had not been anything like that before?

COURTLAND COX: It didn't exist.

INTERVIEWER: It didn't exist.

COURTLAND COX: It didn't exist. And, I mean, and it really—I mean, that shop—I mean, people were amazed. I mean, one of the things that the black business community—you know, one of the things that went on the list of things that people talk about what Marion did in his first year, clearly that was one of the things at the top of it because, I mean, they did not exist. Outside of Pitts Motor Hotel and a couple of other things, you know, there was no—there were doctors, there were lawyers, there were dentists, you know, preachers, that was the black middle class, not the business community. There were no entrepreneurs, there were no people doing business because there was no marketplace for them. And Marion created a marketplace that allowed them to exist. And not only that, they not only allowed businesses to exist, they allowed the professionals to exist at another level that they hadn't before. Even the ministers, remember Marion gave ministers special tags [license tags for their cars].

[Laughter.]

COURTLAND COX: I mean, so—and he gave them a sense of worth, because Marion coming out of the South, coming out of the Movement, understood the role that the church played in terms of, you know, of the cohesion in the black community. So, I mean, sometimes these ministers were whatever they were, but, I mean, he understood that they had to be catered to. So, I mean, so he enhanced—I mean, and, you know, for the lawyers, he opened up the arena for them in the big law firms. For the accountants, opened it up for the big law firms—I mean the accounting firms. But for the businesses, he created—it was ground zero, I mean, and that, it was a big thing that, you know, that—you know, it was a big issue, I mean, everybody appreciated it. And, you know, a number of people have tried to, quote, recreate it, but you can't recreate it when you don't understand what really you're trying to do. So then you get into foolishness, you know.

INTERVIEWER: With all the things you've done in your life, Mississippi Summer and all that, I mean, the '78 campaign, where does that fit in your pantheon of memorable moments in your life?

COURTLAND COX: It was important. It was a very important piece because, as I was saying earlier, it switched me from protest to power. It allowed me—the '78 campaign allowed me to understand how one begins to function in order to really deal with issues, how you had to fight to get into position. So the fight—the '78 campaign was the fight to get into position. It also allowed you to think about how you had to be creative, how you had to understand what the opposition was doing, how to play the opposition. I mean, it allowed me to see the world at another level, and, you know, particularly after the campaign was won, you know, what it is, what it can mean, to be in power, I mean, and why it's important to actually seek power, you know. And as I try to tell young people what they should be doing, whether it's Black Lives Matter, or Hands Up, Don't Shoot, or whatever, that, you know, I say resistance is important,

but there is always after you resist, then what? You know, what change is made? You're still depending on those who are in power to make change. You know, having gone through '78 and being successful and going through, you know, seeing what can be done when you're in power, it's important that they understand another level of the discussion.

So, I mean, my sense is that I view up to '78, you know, I understood protests, I understood, you know—and I understood also seeking power because I had put a whole bunch of people in elected offices in the South, particularly Lowndes County, took over the county, but while I was involved in it, I was of it, but not in it. You know, so I was—you know, I helped others get to where they were going, but now in '78, I was in it. I was, you know, making sure that the leaflets got handed out. I was making the arguments with my community I existed in. I was trying to think through strategically how you did things. You know, and although I said I didn't get my hands dirty making those phone calls and stuff, that's all right, but, you know, but I'm now, having been in it, I can talk with some authenticity about what it means and where you should be going and what we should be doing as I talk to a lot of these young people today. And, you know, I'm not talking any hypotheticals, I'm talking about what I know and what I see, what I've seen.

So, you know, I think the '78 campaign really dealt with the second half of my life; the first half being, you know, protests, the second half being power.

INTERVIEWER: So going back to that philosophical split between Marion and you, he was right, right? I mean, when—

COURTLAND COX: No, no, he was not right.

[Laughter.]

COURTLAND COX: I think we were—I think we—it was not an either/or, it had to be an and, that you needed to have structure to succeed, but you needed to have a movement and understanding of why in order to be meaningful. You know, my concerns were talking about the what and the why you did things. His and the Movement was talking about how you did things. You need both in order to succeed. So it wasn't a right or wrong, you needed both in order to succeed.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, okay.

[Laughter.]

INTERVIEWER: All right. I think on that note, we'll conclude unless you have anything else you want to say.

COURTLAND COX: Okay, good. No, not today.

INTERVIEWER: Good. Thank you.

COURTLAND COX: All right.